

**FEBRUARY 16, 2000**

**SCHAKOWSKY AND HOUSE DEMOCRATS LEAD CHARGE TO GIVE SENIORS ACCESS TO PRESCRIPTION DRUGS**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and House Democrats today led the charge to give seniors access to affordable prescription drugs. They announced discharge petitions on two bills that would make prescription drugs more affordable for seniors. A discharge petition is a parliamentary tool that allows a majority of members, 218, to force a bill that is being bottled-up in committee onto the House floor for debate.**

**The two bills are H.R. 1495, the Access to Prescription Medications in Medicare Act, introduced by Representatives Pete Stark (D-CA) and John Dingell (D-MI), and H.R. 664, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act, introduced by Representatives Tom Allen (D-ME) and Ronnie Shows (D-MS). H.R. 1495 would add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. It would cover 80% of routine drug expenditures and 100% for chronically ill beneficiaries with drug costs of more than \$3000. H.R. 664 would make drugs available to seniors at the same low prices pharmaceutical companies give favored customers, such as insurance companies and HMOs.**

**"Millions of seniors are in dire need of access to affordable prescription drugs. The President and Democrats in Congress have concrete plans to give those seniors access to affordable drugs. The Republicans, however, have aligned themselves with the pharmaceutical industry over senior citizens," Schakowsky said.**

**"The time to bring these bills to the floor is now. One out of every eight seniors is forced to choose between food and prescription drugs. Delaying only means more seniors will be forced to make these harmful or even life threatening decisions," she added.**

**Schakowsky had released three reports last year that found that pharmaceutical companies are gouging seniors. A report found that drug manufacturers on average charge more than twice as much when drugs are intended for human use than for animal use. Another report concluded that uninsured seniors living in the Chicago area pay 114% more for their medications as compared to HMOs and insurance companies. Finally, a report found that seniors living in the Chicago area pay 80% more for the same drugs sold in Mexico and Canada.**